

THE EFFECTS OF LIBERALISM ON IRANIAN RELIGIOUS INTELLECTUALISM: CASE OF MOJTAHED SHABESTARI

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Abstract

After destroying the left party and Marxist regimes in East Europe and Soviet Union in the last decades of 1980, liberalism as the globalized ideology in the world over dominated the dominant ideology in the world. In this regard, Iranian scholars applied liberalism ideology in their views. Religious intellectualism esp. Dr. Abdolkarim Soroush and Mojtabeh Shabestari had the most and strongest effects of liberalism on their opinions. In the present study we deal with Mojtabeh Shabestari's ideas in the second decade of 1980 in Iran, a decade which it was coincident with the deteriorating Marxist power, the dominated power at that time. The main question is how much Mojtabeh Shabestari used liberalism ideology in his views and ideas? Based on overlapping his ideologies with liberalism features the hypothesis of this research shows that he had been influenced a lot by liberalism. We used an analytical methodology to scrutinize the topic well based on documents and books .

Key words: Liberalism, Intellectualism, Religious Intellectualism, Ideology, Shabestari

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Introduction:

The source of liberalism is France where people asked for equality. Anyway, liberalism is a philosophical school. It is a school with a special ideology and universality for individuals. The general features of liberalism include freedom, tolerance, secularity, govern of law, democracy, human right, rationality, science and development.

The 20th century flowered with overdominating liberalism. The liberalist model of representative administration with an economic bazar base -which was affected based on political and social reforms in west- distributed permanently across the world containing the other features of liberalism from the aspect of freedom to human right (Hee Wood 1383: 125).

This claim could be understood by collapsing the communism as the main rival of liberalism in the 20th century. There are a lot of articles and publications e.g. Fukuyama's well known article "the end of history and the last man" in establishing liberalism as a universal ideology compare to the other schools and ideologies in the world. Fukuyama in his article "the end of history and last man" stated that liberalism is very important as a universal ideology. Fukuyama 1989 observed the unity of liberalism over the other ideologies.

After collapsing communism regims in east Europe and Russia, the deceased liberalism after 1th World War, again arose and became the main discourse of the world esp. among the world elites due to great changes in the world. With considering the works published at that time this claim might be obvius. Intellectulism in Iran esp. after 1979 Revolution was influenced by the current mainstreams in the world. In this regard, religious intellectualism had a better position among other aspects and levels of intellectualism after the Revolution. After the sixties decade in Iranian calendar with a positive view toward liberalism, intellectuals at that time changed their attitude with those before the Revolution. They preferred rationality compare to the formers. In fact, religious intellectualism due to changes in the world due to tolerating the situation, tried a lot to consider all aspects. They focused not only on rationality but also on manipulating religion, freedom, paying attention to individuality of human beings as a rational animal, human rights, tolerance and accepting other's point of view.

Considering all works, books and articles published in religious intellectualism we can name some scholars like Abdolakrim Soroush and Mojtabeh Shabestari. In this study we deal with Shabestari's works due to plenty of amount. This was because we want to say the reason why we chose this scholar. Also we should say that it was not possible to consider the topic in a

general form in order to prevent verbosity and subjective study. The other aspect in this work is the features of liberalism like democracy, tolerance, human right etc. that we deal with.

Features of liberalism:

Democracy is a combination of two Greek words Demos and Kratos i.e. power and government of people (Hantington 1373: 25).

Liberalism does not only overlap with democracy but also we can say that democracy is one of the natural expansions of liberalism. The aim of democracy is not the ideal aspect of it but it is the systematic or political way of governing people and it is the government of people. Governing of people is effective when majority of citizens directly or indirectly participate in group descisions and they have their own right or in another sense the political right should expanded in a way that both male and female have equal rights, a right that will be limited by the minimal age, i.e. the maturity age (Bobio 1376: 51-52).

We should state that liberalism from the beginning welcomed equality and gradually accepted the ideology of democracy in a wide range. From this view point, democracy originated in liberalism. Generally, liberalism in a broad sense means the common heritage in the world sourced in western civilization, the basic of democratic thought, social-democracy and socialism but in a limited concept of economy, the ideology of parties and special governments they support the common economy in a classical sense (Bashiriye 1387: 14).

Liberalism in 20th century paid attention to the cooperation of all political parties and all social classes in the society and it focused on fighting with poorness and joblessness, supporting the congress institution and all the other social aspects of government (positive government). Therefore, liberalism from 1880 to 1914 has a positive and democratic attitude (Bashiriye 1387: 21). It should be pointed that the variety of democratic elements (political and individual equality of people, government of people, separation of powers etc.) all have been originated from a this statement that democracy is principally a systematic government while liberalism is an ideological system. This definition can be a feature and parameter to born and extract concept of democracy from the heart of liberalism in recent decades.

The main and basic influence of liberalism in administration was as an institution with a great power at the heart of society. From a liberal point of view, the main goal of government was protecting freedom, equality and security of citizens. Liberalism in order to protect citizen and minority right made a lot of limitations for the existence administration. This right is well

known with a lot of names like social freedom, natural right and human right. The position and place of human right in international liberalism theory, in fact, is based on the moral theory of Immanuel Kant. Indeed, it is demonstration of moral actors, practical rationalism which accepts the basic principle of moral human right. Although, Kant in his political writings believe that stable political situation of administrations is dependent on a citizen oriented government which it can express freedom and independent but it needs a peaceful regularity between nation and government which is based on consciousness and understanding of basic human right (Brey 1973: 85). Obviously, there is a distinction between traditional and modern liberalism toward the role of government in expanding human right. In traditional liberalism, individual module is a region and independency with no interference of government because in such condition the basic core of right is individual possession and the government appears as a non-human right element. In modern liberalism we need the interference of government to protect and support of a good situation regard to real freedom of human beings but the role of government will be limited and administration is just an assistant and a supporter of right esp. human rights. Liberals interpret regularity in a universal liberal regularity. George Soresen in his article “what kind of universal regularity?” believes that a civilized society and law citizenship will come to existence when economic is based on the principles of bazaar and equal distribution of wealth and money in society and also innovativeness in helping humans to be freelance. Liberals define universal regularity in the framework of international right, respecting humanities, respecting minorities and religions and also development of economy (Mosafa 1387: 259-277).

Generally, liberals have been changed into one of serious supporters of the above-mentioned ideology in order to expand their thoughts about human right across the world. Today, anyone has been accepted this principle that nobody should be tortured or faced with non-humanistic behaviors (article 5 of universal announcement of human right, article 7 civil-political right and article 3 European convention regard to human right and article 2 American convention regard to human right) (ibid 1387).

Respecting others' right will be meaningful only when there is tolerance with their ideology and behavior. “tolerance is one of the government, society or person's responsibilities and based on this issue there shouldn't be any interference in others activities or ideologies whether it is acceptable or not. Of course, this is right if there is no unnorm behaving regard to these beliefs and activities against people toward their behaviors and beliefs” (Arblaster 1377: 99). Civil

freedoms in liberal-democrate societies are freedom of speech, freedom of establishing parties and NGOs, freedom of religion and school etc. and all of them are key elements of tolerance. "therefore, most interpreters accept that liberalism beside pluralism try to make these ideas practical which are good in nature" (Hee Wood 1383: 80). John Stewart Mil in his book about freedom writes: we can not be sure at all to destroy a belief that we want to deteriorate and it is completely a wrong idea. In Mil's opinion tolerance will lead us to the truth. The positivist psychology that he describes emphasize that we can't reach the truth in a way that we can never say what is moral and or political right or what is good for someone.

The infinite play is a liberal achievement in theory and practical politics. From the ideal tolerance it can be concluded that for a pluralist society with different and variety of beliefs there should be unity to get best for humans (Towid Fam 1382: 171-172). Ralz writes based on our principles in equality and justice this point will be concluded that government doesn't have the right and responsibility of dealing with moral and religious issues based on its vote and thought behave and decide with the majority request. It is the responsibility of government to guarantee accessing freedom and moral and religious equality for the people in a society (Vaezi 1384: 41-42).

Religious intellectualism in Iran

The term religious intellectualism in Iran for the first time has been put forward by Dr. Ali Shariati. Before stating this issue by Shariati, the mainstream of religious intellectualism in Iran has been existed in different forms. Ali Shariati stated that religious intellectualism should be open minded with understanding of his society, his history and his culture. With his lectures and most of his works which were all exerted from his lectures and seminars tried to manipulate his society with a revolutionary method which all was affected by left party discourse. "May be we can say that the most obvious sample to observe the relationship between dominating universal discourse (left party discourse) and dominated ideology in reforming Iran's religious thought is Shairait's work" (Ghoreishi 1384: 212). Shariati believed that ideology is the symbol of movement and dynamicity and culture is symbol of staticity. Shariati tried to alter religion to ideology (Shariati, 1th volume, page 95) so that he could burn the fire of revolution and establish a united society.

One year after Shariati died, the Islamic Revolution in Iran at 1979 will happen. After the revolution, the power of Marxism ideology has been decreased and liberalism overdominated the

world; therefore, a new line of ideology like religious intellectualism has been started. Soroush and his followers criticized the Islamic ideology and Marxism and they turned into change, following law, separation of power, freedom, and tolerance etc. which all and all were the main topics in world's ideology. "From the middle of 1980 great events happened and new chapters in world changes and developments have been occurred. Marxism collapsed and nationalism and liberalism start to live again and liberalism got priority" (Ghoreishi 1384: 208). Indeed, neo-believers in religion on the one hand felt the necessity of rationalism and new western achievements and they couldn't deny fast and current developments of the world and on the other hand they insisted on religion and religious knowledge (Jahanbakhsh 1383: 221).

Religious and Political ideology of Shabestari

Shabestari's attitude to religion has differences with other scholars' attitude esp. traditional scholars to religion based on new world necessities and thoughts. In Shabestari's belief "religion is an existentialism issue. Religion deals with all parts of human body and spirit" (Shabestari 1381: 256)

He classified religion into three categories (esp. Islam):

- 1- knowing God and his messenger
- 2- getting what the messenger said
- 3- get a direction to life based on messenger's messages (Shabestari 1384: 34).

He believes that knowing God and his messenger can not be successful based on Bible (esp. Quran) only and we need help of knowing other sciences esp. humanism studies. For this we need to use all knowledges and thoughts in every decade. Shabestari exemplify the translation and interpretation of Seyed Mohammad Bagher Sadr of a Quranic verses 32 to 34 of Abraham chapter. Sadr has been interpreted these verses based on current developments in 20th century and due to accessibility of sociology scholars to study univers which is completely different with previous translations and interpretations. Then he argues against traditional scholars and his opponents that "if it is the right interpretation of individuals from the beginning of Islam, then what does it mean for us as audience of this book? In addition, it is important to mention that the interpretation of audience in the first days of inspirations to the messenger is something controversial" (Shabestari 1384: 155). He put forward the necessity of reconstructing and reforming Islamic thought compare to Christianity and developments which arrived after Renaissance. "In past, all parts of Bible were considered as inspiration words. After popularizing

the methodology of criticizing and considering history in knowledge of history, criticizing old and new books started nowadays, nobody talk about inspiration of Bible words and verses” (ibid 172). He advised following new world. Shabestari believes that it is not correct to use old concepts from old world which relates to several centuries ago and it is not correct to use the interpretations of Muhammad and Ali. Concepts like freedom of speech and ideology or talking about human right or similar topics can not be extracted from the heart of tradition. “we should pass formation of religion. This is a dynamic Jihad. Until when we emphasize the justice of Ali and we ask others to follow his style of life it means that we have still close our eyes to the reality and main questions in life. Instead of paying attention to howness of establishing administration institutions and their relations to each other in order to decrease evilness of power we should pay attention to the behavior of individuals. Instead of questioning rational structures and justice of government the main question (who should govern) should be replaced then we get involve in delaying theoretic and practical problem solving of the society. Our current problem is that how can we govern, which system is justice and which one is not” (Shabestari 1381: 365).

Shabestari in response to anyone who is trying to find an answer for questions based on Quranic verses and tradition and with finding some words as for evidence of similarity with current findings said that “we shouldn’t bring out the text from context. We should see that what meaning has this speech at its historical-cultural context” (Shabestari 1381: 481) e.g. if there is something about equality in some verses we can not compare it with equality in human right which is based on tolerance in accepting all ideologies even those are opponents.

Shabestari points to another issue regard to reforming and reconstructing the Islamic thoughts. He reject the right of God in interfering in administration and the right of finalizing the acceptance of officials which most of scholars emphasize to it and also he rejects the right of governing of messengers. “In my opinion, there is no governing right for messengers. The messengers brought the message of God. During the history this message and path has positive aspects which we can see in all social, moral and spiritual aspects and its progression. But the role of messengers during the history was just the transmitter of message not a governor. Theory of special government from God to messengers is a false one and it can not be defended” (ibid 512).

Shabestari wants to get this result that God took the responsibility of governing to human beings themselves and he has no interference in the form of administration. “Not messengers, not

schoalrs and not cergyments from this view point that they are the representatives of God have no right of governing” (ibid 516). In fact, in the issue of governing, they have the same right as the others have not more than that. "The question is who has the right for governing? And the answer is people (ibid 518). Therefore, we can choose and have any kind of government in an ideological community even in Muslim community. Shabestari says that no where in Quran it has been mentioned to the methodology of governing and system of government but what is important inview of Quran is justice in governing. “therefore, what is a principle from political view and it should always be static without any changes is the governing of governors based on God’s justice” (Shabestari 1384: 60).

Liberalism and Shabestari:

Shabestari in order to define democracy bring dictatorship compare to it (Shabestari 1381: 108). To show the difference between a democratic government with other forms of governing he says: “what makes distinction between democaratic government with other governmetns is that a democratic government can weaken groups and communities in society which got power and bring law and justice to the government in order to keep freedom of speech and opposite ideas in society”(ibid 109). In this definition we can consider other features of liberalism except from democracy because we can define tolerance as follow: tolerance and peaceful coexistence will be founded in a society that it allows people to express their ideologies and in such society we can have democracy.

Shabestari believes that in defning terms there should not be misconception. So “Islamic democracy” is meaningless. Because in “Islamic democracy, government advertise Islam and there is no equal reaction to philosophy and ideology of other schools” (ibid 142). Therefore, adding Islam to democracy is wrong. Democracy looks at all ideologies and thoughts even the opponents and all of them are equal and there is no priority. He says against the practitioners of Islamic democracy that “no religion prescribes the way of governing and in Islam also it doesn’t exist. The messenger followed the time style of governing and he was not founder of a special style of government” (ibid 150). On this base, “at the current time Muslim democracy (with respecting human right and all the other features of democracy in countries like Turkey, there is pluralism of religion and thought) can exist but Islamic democracy can not” (ibid 151). Muslim democracy is term in order to make a distinction with Islamic democary in Shabestari’s lexicon.

Otherwise, democracy in his terminology has no palce and suffix and the liberal meaning of democracy might be considered.

He exemplified an ideal example of voting and expressions in a Muslim community, in such societies contradictory with an Islamic democratic government people have been allowed to express their ideas even with opposition ideas which don't parallel with the main ideology which is Islam. "expressing this ideology and belief like any other beliefs in a democratic government face with opposite point of views of political and cultural leadrs of Islam and it is obvious that muslims with Islamic ideology which do not accept this idea try to raise against it" (ibid 113). But what can Muslims do? This effort esp. in complex societies with variety of cultural and political ideologies like our society is not something except from a one side ideologic issue and acting against the others (ibid 113). Therefore, he doesn't accept negating any ideology because of existing a special ideology even in a democratic society.

In a people oriented society, power is not specific for a special group of people or individuals and "citizenship right preserved for all people in the society with any ideology, thought etc. in this society there might be groups that have different values with muslims. However, Muslims can not violate the rules and force anyone in order to accept their ideology while they have to accep a democratic way with respecting everyones ideology" (Shabestari 1383: 150). Shabestari with this introduction give a people oriented interpretation and this concept in a general point of view has different layers. An ideal society is a society with tolerance and all people cooperate with each other. With this regard he doesn't accept adding the suffix "religion" to democractic government (like Islamic Democracy) and it brings this concept in contradiction with democracy. Naming democratic government is not only rational but also it is a contradiction in a political concept and decreases the political clarification and we should prevent it (ibid 152).

After talking about democracy, Shabestari talks about human right. The basic thought of Shabestari regard to human right is a humanistic interpretation not a metaphysic interpretation. He believes that human right is not anti-religion and it is well aware of liberalism principles in this regard. "human right is a regular and systematic principle in order to organize the relationship between individuals in any society with each other and government and the relationship between human beings with other nations in international scene with each othre" (Shabestari 1381: 200-199).

Shabestari with pointing to human rights principles in three main articles “freedom of thought, ideology and expressing thought and ideology”, “equality of all human beings in their rights and responsibilities” and “participating all human beings in making a social life” believes that these principles are production of other great schools and cultures in the world with any ideology and thought which is a complementation for human dignity. He links the concepts of human rights and democracy together. At first step human right –freedom right- will be honorified only via democracy and through this process it can get meaning and sense at the current age (ibid 225). Therefore, human right has a strong connection between humans’ behavior and society so “the aim of human right is that anu humans in the scence of social and political cooperation in common life should have equality with others” (ibid 225).

Shabestari consider the content of human right as something non-religion not anti-religion. He prefers the articles of human right by UN not metaphysic human right principles. In his critzings toward “metaphysic human right” by writers like Javad Amoli in his book “the philosophy of human right” and Mohammad Taghi Jafari “universalhuman right” in a comparative study brings some reasons in order to reject metaphysic human right. “we ask these scholars how do you expect the world to accept everyone your human right which is extracted from your books and traditions. The one who doesn’t believe in your sources, hiw can your human right find a common and practical solution to the problems between muslims and non-muslims” (ibid 244). In Shabestari’s opinion, we can not force all human beings to metaphysics and obey from a united religion because if they accept it nothing happens because metaphysic human right is strange with social and historical reality.

Shabestari see a link between dignity of a human being and human right. In his opinion if the messenger was alive at the current time he definitely accept human right and he would has no problem with it. If the messenger lived at the current time he would agree with human right. Human right set the relationship between human beings not the relationship between human beings with God. The human rights freedom is the freedom of human beings toward humans and it doesn’t mean that acknowledging or denying of humanistic of humans for God has equal result (Shabestari 1379). In fact, Shabestari with this example wants to make a link between Islam and human right and he insists on tolerating opposition of ideas and ideologies so that a civil society can get meaning. In tolerating a person makes himself limited. A person who tolerates, makes himself limited and brings a border between himself and others. He feels others and he accepts

others formally (Shabestari 1384: 69). Shabestari in defining terms like tolerance gives some equivalents and define this term based on traditional society and attack defining this term based on religious tradition. He believes that a concept like tolerance relates to this age and time and it is a western concept which is a liberal feature. It is wrong if we try to correct the the unrational and unfinished mixed meaning and we name it as Islamic tolerance (Shabestari 1381: 70). So he sees the tolerance based on a liberal definition like this “accepting political and social right for others, in case it is possible has been accepted by others, all humans beside beings human with different behaviors, morals, beliefs and ideology have equal rights (ibid 70)”. This important issue can be done when we accept the time human right. In one sense it shouldn't be perfectionism and it shouldn't force the society to accept their principles in order to be followed.

Shabestari define the role of government in making tolerance in society as follow: “political and social tolerance can exist in a society that government is protector of freedom not the protector of realities. These two topics are different from each other. Since government introduce itself as the protector of freedom system, it gives the identification of reality to scholars in order to clarify the issue with discussing together. People and groups that talk about reality and they can discuss more confidently therefore in such society tolerance is more meaningful” (ibid 72-73).

Conclusion:

Democracy, human right and tolerance are main features of liberalism which in recent decades scholars and mass media repeatedly used this term. What is necessary for the thought of a scholar is that to be the son of its time. Religious intellectualism has been known as a mainstream activity of peaceful activities between tradition and religion. Undoubtedly, in order to understand the speech of the time by any scholar, we should know the thought and ideology of any time. It seems that religious intellectualism paid a lot of attention to this issue.

As it has been stated and based on the hypothesis, Mojtaba Shabestari as one of the main characters in religious intellectualism after the revolution with applying liberalism concepts tried to speak with new terminologies. He got many concepts from Christian and liberal scholars to transfer his ideas to others and in this study we pointed to three concepts.

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